

# Congresswoman NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

Representing New York's 12th Congressional District

Ranking Democratic Member, House Small Business Committee



## Bike Tour for Proposed Path on Brooklyn Waterfront

Cyclists, including Congresswoman Velázquez, participated in a bike-tour to show their support for funding of a bike and pedestrian path – the projected route of the 18-mile Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway that would run from Greenpoint to Sunset Park. Congresswoman Velázquez spoke at the start to kick-off the event.

"The scenic route of the bike path we will ride today provides an opportunity for recreation, relaxation and education – but just as importantly, it provides a sense of pride in the history and beauty of our home – Brooklyn," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "This is why I have requested \$15.5 million in federal funding for these greenway projects, and other similar projects, to enhance and increase public access to some of Brooklyn's most beautiful and historical outdoor attractions. Imagine having our own path, comparable to the Hudson River Park Greenway in Manhattan, right here in our Brooklyn neighborhoods."

The Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway Taskforce has advocated for this proposed bike and pedestrian path since 1998. The half-day bike tour was attended by elected officials, local residents and supporters and provided an opportunity to show where the new path



Congresswoman Velázquez participates in the bike tour of the proposed bike path for the Brooklyn Waterfront.

would run and how it would contribute to the overall health and vitality of local communities.

## Velázquez Continues to Fight for NYC's Small Businesses

Congresswoman Velázquez, Ranking Democratic Member of the House Small Business Committee, made key changes to the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Disaster Loan Program to aid small businesses in NYC still suffering from the events of 9/11 and the sluggish economy.

"In just two months we will observe the two year anniversary of September 11," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "It has not been an easy two years here. Throughout the city, business owners were faced with unprecedented business losses, unemployment, factory closings and infrastructure obstacles. While there were many small businesses that received some assistance, given the economic situation, they continue to struggle."

A program that provided financial relief to New York City small businesses post September 11 was the SBA's Disaster Loan Program. This program approved approximately 5,700 loans totaling about \$475 million in the New York City disaster area. But some of those small businesses that did receive SBA loans are now carrying debt and trying to survive in a weak economy.

In an effort to help these businesses, Congresswoman Velázquez included a provision in the SBA reauthorization for loan deferment. This would require the SBA to suspend borrower loan payments for between 2 and 5 years if the business would suffer substantial economic injury from repaying the loan. Business owners would then benefit from a cash infusion, without having to worry about the debt dragging down their enterprise or accruing interest on their loan.

"The SBA's Disaster Loan Program was important to providing capital and stabilizing businesses in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "What we are finding now, though, is that due to the war with Iraq, the SARS scare and a



Congresswoman Velázquez speaks at City Hall regarding NYC small businesses.

weakened economy, businesses are still hurting, with many just a few months away from closing their doors. These changes will give small business owners the time they need to get their businesses back on track."

It is the hope of Velázquez, as the legislation works its way through the process, to turn this deferment provision into an outright grant proposal in the final bill, which will be considered by Congress sometime this fall.

# Velázquez Amendment Provides Funding for Housing

Funding was successfully increased by \$150 million for the Section 8 voucher program, targeted to low-income families, the elderly and the disabled, in an amendment to the VA-HUD appropriations bill, which had failed to renew 85,000 of these vouchers.

“Unemployment is up, the markets are down and housing costs continue to rise,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “The need for housing assistance is skyrocketing across the nation and homelessness is at a ten-year high. In fact, the housing crisis is so bad in New York City that low-income families were actually housed in jail cells.”

For the last several years, the budget of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has experienced deep cuts to its Section 8 voucher program. In the last year of the Clinton administration, 79,000 new Section 8 housing vouchers were appropriated. When President Bush took office, that number dropped to 18,000 and in FY 2003, no new vouchers were appropriated. As a result of this chronic underfunding, only one-fourth of low-income households that are eligible for vouchers receive any federal housing assistance.

The Congresswoman’s amendment, which she sponsored with Congressman Jerrold Nadler, would offer some relief by providing an additional \$150 million to protect nearly 22,000 vouchers jeopardized in the VA-HUD federal spending bill.

“We are all well aware that the Republican tax cuts would put us in such a budget crisis that funding for all low-income programs would be on the chopping block,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “Section 8 assistance threatened by this bill, and without this amendment, 85,000 families will likely be evicted.”

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program is one of the most successful federal rental programs. It provides vouchers that allow families the flexibility to receive government subsidized rental housing in the private market. By using the Fair Market Rent in each locality, tenants pay only 30 percent of their income toward housing, with the voucher making up the difference. In New York City, there are approximately 105,000 vouchers serving more than 200,000 residents.

## IRS Day in Brooklyn for Local Small Businesses

Congresswoman Velázquez joined the IRS in hosting the second annual Brooklyn Small Business Information Day,

“As Ranking Member of the House Small Business Committee, I work to promote small business and entrepreneurship in this country and in New York City,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “Our economy is based on small business. Today there are more than 60,000 businesses that make up Brooklyn’s economic base, and roughly 75 percent of those are small. These businesses were hard hit by the attacks of 9/11 and these are the same businesses that have the capability to breathe life back into our city’s weakened economy.”

The Congresswoman spoke about her plans for Brooklyn small businesses including addressing the need for health insurance, and providing grant money to those businesses that received disaster loans following 9/11. She also spoke about her recent work in Congress on the reauthorization of the \$200 billion in federal programs

that make up the Small Business Administration. Much of these resources are channeled to Brooklyn – last year SBA-backed loans provided Brooklyn small businesses with over \$178.3 million in critical financing.

Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) and Women’s Business Centers (WBC) were also mentioned as tools that are available to assist small businesses. The SBDC at Boricua College and the WBC at the Local Development Corporation of East New York are two centers open to local businesses.

“By working together, I am confident that we can further empower Brooklyn small businesses – I want to accomplish this by providing you with the resources and tools for continued success,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “I encourage all new and existing business owners to take advantage of the assistance that is offered through local centers. Please continue to provide me with your feedback – I need to hear from you so that we can overcome these challenges facing small businesses.”

## Fight to the Finish for Head Start Funding

Congresswoman Velázquez spoke out in opposition on the House floor regarding the School Readiness Act of 2003 (H.R. 2210) because of its threat to the future of the Head Start program in New York.

“The work we do here in Congress is all about priorities – and the decisions we make are a measure of what we value as a nation,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “What this bill shows us very clearly is that low-income children are again not a priority for our president and the Republican leadership.”

Currently, there are over 3,000 children enrolled in 30 Head Start programs in Rep. Velázquez’s district. Almost 90 percent of those children are living in families that receive public assistance or have incomes below the federal poverty line.

In addition to early childhood opportunities, these children receive important medical and social services through Head Start. In fact, 97 percent of Head Start children that live in the Congresswoman’s district receive health care and 96 percent have a continuous source of dental care through their services. This program has also provided mental health services to hundreds of local children as well as assistance to children with disabilities.

The changes put forth by this legislation would cause children and families to lose the federal guarantee that provides early education programs, medical and dental care, mental health assessments and other services. By favoring a “block grant” approach, which fails to designate funding for specific Head Start services, the program could be easily eliminated.

“I am outraged by this bill, but I am not surprised,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “The Republican leadership constantly praises family values, yet its legislative agenda so clearly fails to value American families. This legislation jeopardizes funding, slashes critical health services, weakens educational standards, and repeals civil rights protections.”

For almost 30 years, the Head Start program has assisted low-income preschool children and their families, establishing a comprehensive early-learning environment and assisting children and families with a variety of medical and social needs that affect educational performance. The program has provided services to over 20 million children nationwide since its inception in 1965.

## Grants Awarded to Our Community

### U.S. Department of Education

\* St. Francis College \$496,750  
For its technology initiative

### Dept. of Health and Human Services -- HIV/AIDS Bureau

\* Lutheran Medical Center \$600,000  
For special projects of national significance to contribute to care services for persons with HIV

### Dept. of Health and Human Services -- National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering

\* Polytechnic University \$20,000  
For advances in optics for biotechnology, medicine and surgery

### The New York Community Trust

\* Turning Point Housing Development Fund Corporation \$50,000  
To provide housing and job placement assistance to homeless young women

\*Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project \$20,000  
To recruit and train volunteer lawyers and assist almost 400 low-income seniors

### U.S. Dept. of Transportation -- Federal Transit Administration

\*Metropolitan Transportation Authority in NYC \$13,278,362  
For commuter service to New York’s East Side